

THE ATTITUDE OF AMERICAN CITIZENS  
OF GERMAN BLOOD IN THE  
EUROPEAN WAR

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SPEECH

OF

HON. RICHARD BARTHOLDT  
OF MISSOURI

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 19, 1915



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SPEECH  
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HON. RICHARD BARTHOLDT.

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under consideration the bill (H. R. 20975) making appropriations for the Diplomatic and Consular Service for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1916, and for other purposes.

Mr. BARTHOLDT. Mr. Chairman, in discussing the affairs of the Nation on this floor we find our task on some occasions more weighty with responsibility than on others. This is true with me at this particular time, when I undertake to discuss from an American viewpoint the situation in this country resulting from the great European war. I do not know whether I am equal to the task, but, mindful of all real obligations of neutrality, I shall confine myself to such matters in which my judgment can claim at least a modest degree of competence. And as this will probably be the last time I shall have the honor to address the House I crave the attention of my colleagues.

The United States has a composite population. Not England alone, but all Europe is its mother, and contributions to the blood which now circulates through the Nation's veins have been made by practically all countries, the largest share next to Great Britain having been contributed by Germany or the States now constituting the German Empire. American statesmen recognized early in our history that ours was not a ready-made nation, but a "nation to be" whose character was to be shaped by the impress made upon it by the various elements constituting its growing population. It was also recognized that Saul could not at once turn into Paul, that the newcomer could not change his traits overnight. It is probably true that the Anglo-Saxon is less free from racial or national prejudices than the cosmopolitan German—a strange phenomenon, for they come from the same cradle—yet such was the tolerance of our older statesmen that they never regarded the love of the immigrant

for the old country as in any wise irreconcilable with his allegiance to the new. And why? Because reverence for the mother never detracts from love for the bride, and, furthermore, because that reverence is a natural impulse which can no more be regulated or controlled than can the throbs of the human heart. We can educate an immigrant in our way of thinking, induce him to adopt our customs and make a good American citizen of him, but we can not change his heart to the extent of eradicating his regard for his native land. Along with freedom of thought and conscience we must grant him the liberty of placing his sympathies and affections where he pleases. It is a natural right which no law can limit and no government can deny him as long as our own country is not involved. American statesmanship had the choice of either closing the gates of the country or of taking its chances with the constant human influx. It chose the latter course, and history does not record a single instance to prove that policy to have been a mistake. While the people of the United States have been gathered from all nooks and corners of the globe, while many of them still differ in habits, customs, and language, and while on occasions the sympathies of the first, second, and even third generations still go out to the land of their ancestors, no serious problem has thereby been created. Our adopted citizens and their native descendants have stood the test of loyalty in every crisis in the country's history, and thus irrefutable proof has been adduced that memories of the fatherland conjured up by impulses of the heart do not and will not detract from the allegiance due to the adopted country. [Applause.]

I ask you to keep this essential point in mind when I proceed to define the attitude in the present crisis of one great element of our population, that of the American citizens of German blood. Owing to press denunciations they are entitled to a hearing, and therefore it is incumbent upon some one familiar with their sentiments and aspirations to interpret these sentiments for the information of this House and the country. I shall not discuss the war, either as to its causes or the merits of the contentions of either party, but confine myself strictly to American or home issues which now confront us in conse-



quence of the stupendous struggle. Because of their sympathies with the fatherland, the Americans of German descent have been openly accused of divided allegiance and downright disloyalty. They know this wanton insult to emanate from English and French press agents, and consequently treat it with the contempt it deserves. But what they resent is that, in the face of our own history, the American press should have opened its columns to such calumnies. Germans have fought and bled on the battle fields of four American wars and furnished a larger proportion to the fighting strength of our country than any other of the so-called foreign elements. In the Revolutionary War, with Baron Steuben they espoused the cause of the Colonies, and the implicit confidence which the Father of our Country placed in their loyalty is a matter of history. In 1861, when many of the English, with instinctive aversion to American naturalization, took out British protection papers, the Germans—that is, nearly 200,000 of them—rallied around the flag of Abraham Lincoln to save the Union. They displayed the same valor in the War of 1812 and in the Spanish-American War, and their loyalty to the flag in times of war is equaled only by their loyalty to American ideals in times of peace. [Applause.] I should have much preferred if just at this time these historical truths had been uttered by other than a German-American tongue; but while our pro-English press is ignoring them, Americans of German blood should at least have expected immunity from libels and insults. Yet such insults are heaped upon that element by newspapers permitting agents of the allies to use their space for that purpose. We can best judge the future by the past, and the lessons of the past justify me in proclaiming it as an irrefutable fact that if unfortunately the United States should ever again be embroiled in war, which the Heavens forbid, the Germans of this country would again as loyally rally around the Stars and Stripes as they did against our enemies in every crisis of the past. [Applause.] Let me again assert in most positive terms what I said on the floor the other day, that the Germans are for America against England, for America against Germany, for America against the world! They will never waver for one second in their allegiance to the land of their choice and adoption. [Applause.]

These few words will suffice, I trust, to lay bare the charge above referred to in its whole naked infamy. But let me proceed with my argument. If sympathy for Germany is an evidence of disloyalty, as is claimed by our traducers, you will agree that sympathy for the allies is exactly the same thing; and if that be true, we would be confronted with the monstrous fact that the whole American press printed in English, with but few exceptions, is disloyal to the United States. It is absurd, of course, but I make this deduction merely to show that I am not a less patriotic American by sympathizing with the fatherland and its ally than I would be if my sympathies were for England and her allies; and certainly no true American will claim that to side with England and to oppose Germany is a prerequisite of loyal American citizenship, for that would mean both truckling to a former enemy and the betrayal of a traditional friend, a course absolutely unjustifiable by any standard of American loyalty.

There is no question, Mr. Chairman, but what at the present time the Germans of this country are stirred as they were never stirred before. Their state of mind manifests itself in great mass meetings and in hundreds of thousands of petitions addressed to Congress in favor of an embargo on arms. It would not be quite correct, however, to ascribe the prevailing excitement solely to sympathy for Germany. In reality it is as much, if not more, injured pride and an outraged sense of justice which have caused their indignation to rise because of the outrageous prevarications of truth and the cruel misrepresentations of Germany, her people, and institutions contained in the manufactured news from England and reprinted in the American newspapers. Proud of their American citizenship, they have in a political sense absolutely nothing in common with Germany or its government, but their more or less accurate knowledge of conditions in that country taught them that the alleged news we were getting was a brutal attempt at defamation to poison the American mind against Germany. The war was started with a monstrous lie, and in order to support it a thousand other lies had to be told. The Germans were de-



nounced as Huns and barbarians, as ravishers and plunderers, and as perpetrators of the worst imaginable atrocities. The Emperor was described as an Attila, who on one day had had 110 Socialist deputies executed; the Crown Prince as a thief, and so forth. You might say that it is natural for enemies to revile each other, but I must answer that, so far as Germany is concerned, she herself, though obliged to fight the lie as one of the worst of her many enemies, has not yet stooped to a departure from the truth either in her own newspapers or in the messages she has sent out to the world. And permit me to add parenthetically that to the neutral world the present struggle has an enhanced significance in that it is also a warfare of falsehood against the truth. If the international lie should succeed, I believe the world would eventually suffocate in its slime.

The Germans of this country could understand why England to secure recruits should want to incite her own people by these falsehoods, but they could not understand nor will they forgive the American newspapers for reprinting them in our country. To do so was a most serious and an unpardonable reflection on the German element of this country. As an integral part of the American people, whose characteristics and virtues are reflected as much in the composite character of this Nation as are those of the citizens of English descent, they believed themselves to be entitled to some consideration at the hands of the press of their own country. Such consideration was denied them, however, and with utter disregard of their feelings they were rudely informed that their brothers on the other side of the ocean are barbarians, ghouls, and vandals, and that is not all. From the first day of the war up to the present whatever the allies did was all right, while every act of the Germans was all wrong, even if it was an exactly similar thing; for instance, the dropping of explosives from aeroplanes. The alleged violation of Belgian neutrality was harped upon with sickening persistence even after it had been ascertained that the neutrality treaty had expired in 1872, and that, if it had still been in force, the Belgian Government had itself thrown it overboard by its secret agreement with England regarding the landing of English troops on Belgian

soil. On the other hand, not a word is said about the violation of Chinese neutrality by Japanese and English troops, although this matter is of infinitely greater consequence to American interests than the affairs of Belgium can possibly be. The present international status of China is due to the skill of American statesmanship, it being an achievement of John Hay, made possible by the support of Germany alone. The integrity of China, already violated by England and her ally, should be restored and maintained at all hazards, but we look in vain for any appeals in the press in favor of the conservation of American interests in that quarter. It might embarrass England, you know, if just now the press insisted on our own rights. As to Belgian atrocities, five American newspaper men of the highest standing affirmed under oath that there was no such thing, yet these alleged atrocities are presented to American readers in glaring headlines, while the authentic refutation of the stories is published in small type on the sixteenth or seventeenth page. We may be foolish, but we are not blind to such notorious evidences of partiality. The Americans of German blood are a unit in bitterly resenting not only these unneutral efforts to poison the fountainheads of American public opinion against Germany but also the palpably unneutral "most-favored-nation" treatment systematically accorded to Great Britain. Touching the last-named fact, it seems to them as if we were using kid gloves against England and the mailed fist against Germany, as if, indeed, everything was being avoided, even to the disregard of American interests, that might embarrass the former country in her effort to crush Germany.

The bill of complaints is too long to recite here in full, but let me merely ask: Have we protested against American citizens having been dragged from neutral steamers and thrown into English prisons simply because those men, Americans to the manner born, happened to bear German names? No. Have we protested against England's inhuman policy to starve to death the noncombatant population of Germany by stopping, in open violation of international law, all food supplies, even if carried from a neutral country and in neutral bottoms? No. Have we protested against England declaring the whole North Sea as a



war zone? No; but when Germany did the same thing in practically the same language we immediately dispatched a stiff note to Berlin, while the milder one was directed to England, though it would seem that the latter country was the chief offender in allowing the use of false flags. However, whatever the administration does in foreign affairs, as Americans it will be our duty to uphold it.

After this explanation can you understand, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the House, why the German mind in this country is agitated, and can you blame that element if their feelings are ruffled? When, moreover, it dawned upon them that all our arms factories were running night and day to supply the allies with weapons for use against their brothers and kinsmen, nothing could convince them that the United States was not actually a silent partner of the allies. Then it was that they demanded, and they are still demanding an embargo on arms to enforce honest neutrality, the kind of neutrality which the President proclaimed when he said: "We should be neutral in fact as well as in name, and should put a curb on every transaction which might be construed as giving a preference to one party to the struggle above another." This shameful traffic in arms, they argue, gives the lie to our prayers for peace, because it tends to prolong the war, and its permission by international law, they believe, imposes no obligation on our citizens to carry it on, no more on us than on the other neutral countries which have all stopped it upon the demand of England herself. I should like to discuss this important question at length, if my time permitted, but let me say just one more word. Whether the President would use the authority or not, there ought to be a law on our statute books which confers such authority upon him in order that he might enforce his demands for a free and open sea and unrestricted commerce in noncontraband goods. In our present demands against England our only alternative is to either give in or declare war. The threat of an embargo on arms, however, would quickly bring the "Mistress of the Seas" to terms and without war. Hence the legislation demanded by what the pro-English press is pleased to call German mass meetings, will be a preventive of, rather than a provo-

cation to, war with England, and thus falls to the ground another of the silly charges preferred by the press bureau of the allies against me and the several millions of American citizens who think as I do on this subject.

Continuing as an interpreter of the feelings of these millions, all good American citizens, permit me to say that the hostility of the Anglo-American press against Germany and the Germans has forced many to a conclusion which, if correct, would be the most painful disappointment of my life. They believe this attitude to be less pro-English than anti-German, and, indeed, regard it as the outgrowth of racial prejudice against the Germans even of this country, and as a revival of the old know-nothing spirit which aimed at a sort of guardianship by those of English descent over this country, to the exclusion of all other elements, the latter to be classed simply as "foreigners," and degraded to the rank of second-class citizens. How could such a conclusion be reached? Well, they ask whether the history of the American Germans has not been an honorable one. They fought for independence, opposed slavery, and loyally gave their bodies and lives that the Union might live; they were almost a unit for sound money, and are imbued with the true American spirit of freedom to such an extent that they love liberty better than whatever good might come from its restriction. As a rule, they modestly refrained from seeking political preferment, but filled America's life with music and song and innocent social pleasures. They are peaceful and law-abiding citizens, who by industry and thrift have made the best of the opportunities which the country of their choice generously offered them, and thus they have contributed their honest share to the growth, the development, and the grandeur of the Republic. [Applause.] If such a record of good citizenship is not sufficient, it is argued, to insure the German element immunity from libels and insults, what else can account for it but racial aversion, the innate prejudice of the Anglo-Saxon against everything foreign?

Another argument: Why, it is asked, with intense seriousness, do American newspapers repeat and accept at par all the pretexts which England hurriedly invented for waging



war against Germany, such as "The small States must be protected," "German militarism must be crushed," and so forth? Should not an American, free, neutral, and independent, form his own judgment rather than blindly accept the logic of a belligerent? Does not the proverbial American sense of justice and fair play require us to impartially hear both sides before we render our verdict? Every schoolboy knows the kind of protection England has afforded to smaller States. It is the kind which the spider gives to the fly. And then German militarism! As pacifists we can condemn it along with Russian, French, and English militarism, but of these the German military system is the least objectionable, because, never having been used for a war of conquest, it has been nothing more than a bulwark of national defense, of which every young man of military age feels it a duty and an honor to be a part.

For hundreds of years German soil has been the battle ground of all great European wars, and the poor people of that country suffered as the Belgians, the Russian Jews, and others suffer to-day, only that nobody sympathized with them. Finally they united for self-defense and self-preservation, and out of the smoke and fire of the Franco-German War emerged, as a realization of their fervent hopes and earlier dreams, the United States of Germany. But for the more lasting enjoyment of the blessings of peace the new German Empire combined with Austria-Hungary and Italy, the three forming the Triple Alliance for mutual protection and defence. In spite of her much-decried militarism Germany has kept the peace for 45 years, and she would to-day enjoy the fruits of her peaceful development and consequent prosperity if it had not been for the combined lust of conquest, lust of revenge, and jealousy of the three powers which are now trying to crush her. This is the story of German militarism. But, say my friends, when we relate this story we are cried down and given to understand that our very knowledge of these details is treason, because it shows that we pay attention to other than American interests.

Now, Mr. Chairman, we must admit that Germany is not getting a square deal from us, that she is to be condemned, right or wrong. The reasons are a psychological riddle, which has

distressed me more than anything I ever experienced in my life, the more so because Germany has been our consistent and faithful friend from the beginning of our history. Carl Schurz, as long as 60 years ago, wrote to his friend Kinkel:

It is my belief that the future interests of America and Germany are closely interwoven. However different the two nations may be in character, they will have the same opponents, and that will compel them to have a corresponding foreign policy. America's influence in Europe will be based on Germany, and Germany's world position will depend essentially on the success of America. Germany is the only power in Europe whose interests will not conflict with those of America, and America is the only power in the civilized world that would not be jealous of a strong united Germany. They can both grow without being rivals, and it will be to the interest of each to keep the adversaries of the other in check.

When this was written, in 1855, Japan was not yet a world power, England had not yet tried to help break up the Union, and Germany had not yet had the opportunity to befriend us as signally as she did during the Civil War. Hence, if this was true 60 years ago, it is even more so to-day. And in this connection let me again quote Carl Schurz. In 1903 Pomeroy Burton had asked him about the possibility of a war with Germany, and this was his answer:

A war between the United States and Germany would be so awful, so incalculable a calamity, that only the most absolute and evident necessity could serve as an excuse for it. Not even the wildest jingo on either side will pretend that such a necessity exists or is in prospect. In fact, there is no real question of difference between the two countries important enough to disturb their ancient friendship. A war between them would, therefore, not only be criminal, but idiotic—an absurd atrocity, a murderous nonsense. Even to suggest the possibility of such a war under such circumstances and to agitate the public mind by such suggestions is a piece of mischievous recklessness.

[Applause.]

Mr. Chairman, before I digressed I was discussing the opinions of those who are inclined to ascribe the cause of the anti-German feeling in our country to racial prejudice. The counter-feeling ran high, as we all know, but I concluded that, even if there were some truth in that supposition, it must not be countenanced. If others wished to act in an un-American spirit, let them do so; the Germans, at least, should remain squarely on American ground and totally ignore every display of narrowness which, detestable in itself, would create a schism in this country and, if allowed to grow, eventually rend it asunder. There

should never be a division in the United States upon racial or national lines. Russia, by using Serbia as a tool, has sown the seed of discord between the different races in Austria-Hungary, and we see what it has led to. Under the American sun, in their capacity as citizens, the Teuton and the Slav, the Irishman and the Englishman, the German and the Frenchman extend to each other the hand of brotherhood as equals, and the great flag covers them all. [Applause.] Ancient prejudices have melted away under the sun of freedom until, no longer English, Irish, German, Scandinavian, we are, one and all, heart and soul, Americans! [Applause.]

I believe this to be the true sentiment of all citizens of German blood; and in justice to them it should be said further that in the present crisis they would not have been heard from but for the provocation caused by the outspoken unneutral attitude of the pro-English press and the sales exclusively to Germany's enemies of arms and ammunition. It was easy to direct the movement started by them into loyal American channels, and that, Mr. Chairman, was the purpose of the conference recently held here in Washington. It was a most remarkable gathering. Although Americans of German blood largely predominated, it was not a pro-German, but decidedly a pro-American, meeting, as it was intended to be. Those present were distinguished representatives; in most cases the heads of the great church and civic organizations of all parts of the country; and probably for the first time in our history Republicans and Democrats, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics, Protestants, and Free Thinkers shook hands for a common purpose, and that purpose was to call for an enforcement, in accordance with the spirit of American patriotism, of every American right against all belligerents alike, and to insist on the observance of strict and genuine neutrality as defined by all American Presidents from George Washington to Woodrow Wilson. As plainly indicated by its complexion, the gathering was strictly nonpartisan; and that, too, will be the character of the national organization to be effected as a result of that historic conference. After many hours of earnest deliberation, during which all the speakers displayed a most admirable feeling of restraint, as well as of solemn respon-

sibility, a "declaration of principles," formulated by the platform committee, was adopted by a unanimous vote, and I leave it to the House to say whether this declaration rings true or not. Here it is:

Whereas the spirit of absolute neutrality toward foreign nations at war with one another is a basic tradition of the American people; and

Whereas the course of recent events has made it evident that this cherished attitude has been endangered through a foreign control of our news service and of our communication by sea; and

Whereas our commerce and our citizens have been compelled to endure violation of the principles of international law; and

Whereas the ships of our country in common with those of other neutral nations, having on board the property of citizens of the United States, have been arrested on the high seas by a belligerent power, conveyed into its port and there subjected to a process of search involving delays and losses; and

Whereas citizens of the United States and of nations friendly to us have forcibly been taken off our ships in defiance of the protection accorded them by the American flag and put into prison or detention camps; and

Whereas articles hitherto considered absolutely free in international traffic have been arbitrarily made contraband; and

Whereas the rules of international law governing neutral commerce have been altered or disregarded in the special interest of one set of belligerents to the manifest injury of the United States as an independent Nation with rights to be respected and with citizens to protect; and

Whereas the shipment of arms, ammunition, and munitions of war under conditions now prevailing is unfair, unneutral, and in violation of America's ethical ideas, tends to prolong the war, and is irreconcilable with our prayers for peace; and

Whereas this condition of affairs is intolerable to all American citizens who believe in the principles of neutrality, fairness, and friendship applied to all nations alike, and in the noble mission of this country as a promoter of peace and a champion of justice and humanity: Therefore, in order to reestablish genuine American neutrality and to uphold it free from commercial, financial, and political subservience to foreign powers, be it

*Resolved*, That we, citizens of the United States, agree to effect a national organization the objects and purposes of which may be stated as follows:

1. In order to assure the possession of an independent news service, we favor an American cable controlled by the Government of the United States

2. We demand a free and open sea for the commerce of the United States and unrestricted traffic in noncontraband goods as defined by international law.

3. We favor as a strictly American policy the immediate enactment of legislation prohibiting the export of arms, ammunition, and munitions of war.

4. We favor the establishment of an American merchant marine.

5. We pledge ourselves individually and collectively to support only such candidates for public office, irrespective of party, who will place American interests above those of any other country, and who will aid in eliminating all undue foreign influences from American life.



Mr. Chairman, this declaration hardly needs an explanation at my hands. It is a truly American platform, and one in which good and loyal citizens can stand, will be admitted by anyone whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice and partiality. Let the pro-English newspapers, especially those of New York, denounced it in unmeasured terms. With blind fury they rushed to the defense of British interests, against these so-called hyphenated Americans, foreigners, and traitors who have the temerity to assert American rights at such an inconvenient time. The climax was reached by one of the great metropolitan dailies deliberately reversing the position which the conference took with regard to American and foreign interests. I can not resist the temptation to nail this instructive evidence of jugglery to the masthead. As we have seen, the last plank of the platform reads:

We pledge ourselves \* \* \* to support only such candidates for public office, irrespective of party, who will place American interests above those of any other country.

But the newspaper just mentioned puts it this way editorially:

When the representatives of German-American societies publicly pledge themselves in effect to oppose all candidates for office who will not sacrifice American interests to German interests they are straining American patience to the breaking point.

This is the kind of journalism, Mr. Chairman, that we protest against from the standpoint of simple honesty. It is but a sample of the newspaper war which is being waged against Germany, too. Most of the comments might just as well have been written in London. The injustice of it all is solely responsible for whatever bitterness and indignation there may exist among those who believe in a square deal for Germany. American citizens of German blood simply refuse to accept the judgment of the English censor on the country of their fathers, because they know better; and when that judgment is presented to them by the newspapers of their own country, they protest because it does violence to the truth; and he would be a poor American, indeed, who would not stand up for right and truth rather than falsehood and wrong. As between the two he can not afford to be neutral. In order to guard against misrepresentation

sentations of our country, if ever we should be out with the country that now controls the news service the world, an independent American cable, to be owned and controlled by the Government, is demanded as the first plank of a platform referred to. The other planks speak for themselves.

In conclusion let me reiterate the steadfast devotion of all citizens of German blood to American ideals and the flag. Impatient of injustice though they be, their hearts are true to the core. They feel themselves as one with every other citizen of the Republic, and, right or wrong, they will share the fate of their adopted country and of their children's fatherland. Whatever their secondary sympathies may be, they are with all other true Americans for America first, last, and all the time. [Applause.] They are for a united Nation, and shall ever uphold the ideal of national unity and dignity with that loyalty which has characterized their whole history on American soil.

I thank you for your patience and attention. [Prolonged applause.]

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